

Union Square Civic Advisory Committee  
Meeting Notes 3/11/14

Master Developer Presentations

**I. Introduction**

Wig Zamore, chairman of the CAC, welcomes and opens the discussion for public comment.

**II. Public Comment Period**

Local resident expresses his sentiment that he'd like to see Union Square remain the rich, diverse community that he's grown up in. He would like Master Developer to find ways to keep the neighborhood affordable so residents, families are not pushed out.

**III. Meeting Format**

Edward O'Donnell, Director of Economic Development, provides the meeting schedule for all master developer presentations. The next meeting will be March 18 from 6-8 PM at the Argenziano School. Development teams will also present to the Somerville Redevelopment Authority. Those meetings began last night. There was a meeting today and the last will be on 3/13 from 4-6 PM. All meetings will be videotaped.

**IV. Presentation by Federal Realty/National Development**

- Development is a local game; these are local firms and FRIT is already entrenched in Somerville
- Team has much experience working with MBTA. FRIT has done TOD at Assembly Square; National has done TOD around Woodland Station (Green Line) and Wellington Circle (Orange)
- The team is so well versed working with the MBTA and City of Somerville that it can really hit the ground running and get this project started.
- Vision for USQ of tomorrow is the vision of USQ today – integrate assets like Artisans Asylum and Fringe, local businesses and residents
- They aren't here to create buildings, but rather create neighborhoods where inhabitants can interact between those buildings.
- Design Principles: (1) building gateways to neighborhoods; (2) streets ("green streets") are a significant component of open space; (3) the square, which is the heart of a neighborhood – ensure that it is flexible and programmable; (4) scale: the success of streets, squares depends of design and scale of buildings; and (5) art and placemaking – need to build on all that USQ already offers
- Block D-2: Can begin redevelopment right away. Team has a lot of experience helping to clean and redevelop contaminated sites. National has even redeveloped a superfund site in Woburn. Team is very familiar with MA Contingency Plan
- Interest in building an innovation economy in USQ: opportunity to create critical mass of entrepreneurs and small businesses; opportunity to design flexible real estate solutions (e.g. landlords who are willing to structure unique deals for innovative but young tenants)
- Want to create a pedestrian bridge to connect USQ to Boynton Yards; create a statement building in Boynton Yards that people have a reason to visit. Program it with open, creative spaces and provide incubator spaces that launch economic development

- The team wants to continue working with the City of Somerville and brings five key talents: (1) capital structure – ability to invest; (2) diversity of skillset; (3) proven catalysts for economic development; (4) bench strength locally; and (5) proven long-term partner
- Q&A:
  - Greatest challenge? Striking the right balance (making value-based decisions)
  - Greatest weakness relative to the others? Already a partner at Assembly Row; city might not want to put all of its eggs in one basket but team assures that public won't be disappointed.
  - Team credited Wellington as a success—but Wellington very corporate, non-neighborhood. How will USQ differ? Wellington was a blank canvas whereas USQ is very different and requires a different set of planning strategies. Types of retail at Wellington were a function of market conditions.

## **V. Presentation by US(2) – Magellan/Mesirow Financial**

- Began with video interviewing residents; wanted to identify what residents want to see happen—or not—in USQ
- Despite being Chicago-based, they have constructed a team of facilitators that bring both a local and national (Chicago, Austin, Minneapolis, Nashville, and other cities) perspective. Many team members are locally-based.
- Development approach: collaborative effort between constituencies and their teams; plan for people – then place – then buildings.
- Both a community builder AND master developer. For instance, they've created a second mortgage program to finance affordable housing units
- Experience in repurposing historic buildings
- Transit and Infrastructure:
  - The Glen View in Chicago was a 1100-acre redevelopment of a former naval air station; required \$185M in infrastructure improvements but wound up creating 6k new jobs. Project has since won several national awards and is a model for TOD.
- Details and programs are key for creating beneficial public spaces
- USQ is great, but fragile: 2M sq. ft. of new development won't land lightly
  - Obligation to make new development about community building
  - Community planning: create together; start with 200-300 interviews with residents; need to answer some hard questions and identify tradeoffs where possible
    - At Lake Shore East, there were 150 stakeholder groups, conducted 400 community meetings, wound up obtaining council's full support
- Past experience is best indicator of future experience, and team believes its background shows its ability to move large projects forward in line community vision
- Q&A:
  - Biggest challenge: to gain community's absolute involvement and confidence.
  - Weakness: None. They know they can do this. It's their bread and butter.
  - Resident concern over David Dixon, a member of their team, because his involvement in the ASQ development resulted in several lawsuits: responds that the design at that time was appropriate and moved the project along.
  - Resident concern over USQ being an urban watershed: team is familiar with the challenges of building in a watershed; willing to implement low-impact design principles

## **VI. Presentation by Gerdling Edlen**

- Who are they? Portland, OR based business; experienced in planning, financing, developing and delivering mixed-use projects.
- \$420M in discretionary equity funds to put toward financing project
- Jill Sherman would be the director of the project: experienced in collaborative approach to economic development; focused on creating meaningful public-private partnerships
- Principles of place that drive their developments include: crafting the first 30' in order to make people feel comfortable; transportation alternatives (almost 100% of their projects are TOD); connecting to nature; creating "third spaces" – private spaces open to public use; minimizing energy dependence (have 13 LEED Platinum buildings); shared infrastructure (e.g. parking, bioreactor); inspiring communities with art (based upon local community); integrating schools and neighborhoods; preserving symbols that matter (adaptive reuse, historic preservation)
- Understand the need to phase the project so as not to disrupt USQ's existing ecology. Look at the project like cultural anthropologists.
- Want to create places for people to stop, interact and engage
- Q&A:
  - Biggest challenge: phasing and timing of different projects
  - Weakness: that they're not a Boston-based company; but they have experienced boots on the ground here
  - How to put residents' concerns up front before decisions are made? Will have multiple stakeholder group sessions; understand SomerVision and want to implement the values within; they are interested in creating seamless neighborhoods where you cannot tell where new projects begin and end

## **VII. Closing**

Edward O'Donnell explains that these materials will be made available online at:

<http://www.somervillema.gov/departments/ospcd/economic-development/union-square-redevelopment>